

If a work seems to satisfy all that it promises – and the listener must determine such things for themselves – then it succeeds on the same terms as the snowflake: it earns our trust via striking an ideally proportioned balance between a loss of tension due to sounding either too rigid or too wayward in structure. Naturally some listeners will discover all the tension they need in, say, a work that is mechanically uniform in sound or structure. And some may claim that they find a synthetically manufactured snowflake to be more appealing than what nature offers.

Yet such claims are often meant sincerely and ought therefore to be taken at face value. Regarding the synthetic snowflake, contemplating something incompatible with our design might well deliver a remote chill; in such instances the absence of any vital connection may intensify the experience. And with respect to the thrill of mechanical uniformity in sound and/or structure, there exists in all of us a tribal instinct that cannot – and ought not – be denied. However, such musical responses tend to be adrenalin-based, which is a very different thing from those governed by one's aesthetic sensibilities. That's not at all to say that the former is necessarily devoid of an aesthetic element – and there's no doubting the difference between, say, an irresistible Stevie Wonder 'groove' to one identical in tempo but without primitive energy – but rather that in such instances this element is usually not the principal driving force. The same is true regarding 'hypnotic' musical examples such as those represented in certain works of Minimalism, which effectively lend the former its subliminal counterpart.

FOR THE CHILL OF IT

Returning to the original snowflake idea (the non-synthetic kind), I would suggest that frisson is perhaps unique in that it lends outward expression to an inborn aesthetic act – one highly receptive to degrees of tension – of which the majority of us are susceptible. Therefore, frisson may serve not merely as a physical release of tension, but as a sensation that hints at the very nature and character of our physiological design.

And if the above notion of placing our trust in the deception of appearances sounds paradoxical, it is. That we strive to approach perfection is reflected in our finest creative acts; our children.

“EVERY THING THAT GROWS, HOLDS IN PERFECTION BUT A LITTLE MOMENT”

Shakespeare

That moment of Shakespeare's is the same small distance between God's hand and Adam's; a most exquisite measurement as it relates the point of departure of our human experience. As the surge levels out and dissipates, frisson hints at our essentially paradoxical nature. Maybe this also relates to the terms of sexual selection? Perhaps, but in any event we best not assume that St. Theresa's experience was sexually motivated... In truth, we can't all be St. Theresa. That is why we need art. ●

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